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No. 22.

THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR.

BY LOUISE SCHLEIER.

A pilgrim and a stranger,
I journey on my way;
I seek through tribulation
The light of perfect day;
Through this dim gloom and darkness
I see a gleam afar,
It beckons ever upward—
The bright and morning star.

My beacon never fails me,
Though long and dreary the night;
Though clouds around me darken,
They cannot hide its light.
Courage, the day is dawning,
For lo! I see afar,
In all its radiant beauty,
The bright and morning star.

It guides me to the city
With twelve foundations fair,
Whose walls are jewels rare,
And set with precious stones.
A grand unbroken city,
Revealed to John of old,
Whose gates of pearl are numbered,
And streets are paved with gold.

Though oft my feet are weary,
So long and rough the road,
One steady beacon leads me,
As he who leads the flock,
To share my heavy load.
My faith can never fail me,
The while I see afar,
In all its radiant beauty,
The bright and morning star.

A WOMAN'S VOW.

BY MARY E. WOODSON.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HIDDEN HAND.

Sebastian Alvarez, the spoiled darling of the haughty, in Berlin, dreamed away his existence in one unbroken round of pleasure. Masked balls and operas exhibited him as the handsomest knight amongst a hundred competitors. And court beauties smiled upon him in an unbroken round of pleasure. Masked balls and operas exhibited him as the handsomest knight amongst a hundred competitors. And court beauties smiled upon him in an unbroken round of pleasure.

The accepted lover of a noble and beautiful lady, he could afford to smile haughtily down upon his rivals in the lists, and the young Spaniard's pride of birth was scarcely equal to his pride of bearing. He had but one ungratified wish at heart, and that was to induce his father to join him here. His love for his beautiful sister bordered upon idolatry, and he longed to introduce her into circles where she was so well qualified to shine, and where, in consequence, they might give and borrow lustre from each other.

The first rude awakening came to him in a double letter from father and sister, informing him of the betrothal of the latter to Earle Templeton.

"My father has surely gone mad," he muttered with a suppressed exclamation that sounded very much like an oath. "What would my beautiful Olive say to this untitled Englishman for a brother-in-law? The fellow, it is true, comes of that Devonshire Templeton stock, who trace their ancestry, with vaunting pride, back to those vulgar, beef-eating Saxons in the days of the Conqueror; but between him and the earloms there stand, as my wager, a hundred more direct claimants to the title. My father's heretofore vigorous brain is so immersed in those dead and gone issues in Spain, that he would sacrifice as both in the hope of gaining some slight co-operation on the part of England. Yet what can he hope from this fellow, who has nothing but his person and talents, though they, I will own, are rather more than respectable, to sustain him? No, no, it will never do. Nina must be taught at once that she should look higher than that, unless, Heaven forbid, she should be blinded by a vulgar attachment. At any rate, my father, when aroused, must see that he has erred, and put an end to the matter at once."

He re-read their letters, and his brow grew more overcast.

"Nina talks like a school girl, of his having saved her from the hands of the pirates; but she is a girl, and though any boatman in the land might not have done that, he saved mine too—as I did a peasant girl from the dikes in Holland—but I did not ask her hand in marriage. She, however, is the daughter of our house, and must obey. Now for the more serious reasoning with my father."

Juan Alvarez wrote composedly yet feelingly of the proposed alliance. "In present circumstances, and in money, I might have fairly calculated to dispose of my daughter to greater advantage," he said, "but with our crippled lands, what need have we of increased fortune, strangers are already diving into our purse and robbing us of what we have. Men of rank equal to our own, are, in nine cases out of ten, devoid of ambition, except licentiously to squander patrimony; or at best are content with some affairs, having nothing to gain, and all to lose, they seldom led into foreign intrigues from a love of adventure; and when they are, we find them adventurers indeed scarcely more to be despised than mistreated. Here is a man with the brain of a Wolsey, a Richelieu, or a Talleyrand, and with the impetus his friends may give him, when they find that he is backed by a princely fortune (he is no longer a moneyless adventurer whom every one avoids), there is no limit to the emulgence which he may attain. In short, I had gravely viewed the case from every standpoint, having foreseen to what the consequences might lead; and, conscientiously, I do not think a more eligible offer for my daughter's hand could have been presented."



THE PARTING.

"WHAT IS IT, EARLE?" HER LITTLE HAND LAY ON HIS ARM.

"YOU HAVE DONE NOTHING THAT REQUIRES YOU UNWORTHY?"

"Was ever anything equal to the madness of this?" muttered the young man. "And here half of these young bloods are mad over that ill-done picture of her in my chambers! I must write at once."

A lengthy and rather vigorous epistle was the result of the next hour's labor. He entrusted his father to reconsider the very grave matter before them, into which he was sure he had been indiscreetly hurried. Their own fortunes were at a falling house was an occasion presented where distinguished alliances should be more eagerly sought, than by every member of the Alvarez household. All the talent in the world could not avail them unless that talent was combined with influence; and the young aspirant for his sister's hand was simply a shrewd barrister—perhaps entirely unknown and untried for by the relations upon whose name he depended for a passport into respectable society.

His sister's extreme youth, if nothing else, should forbid her having a voice in the matter. And her beauty, station, wealth and accomplishments might warrant them to hope even for a princely alliance. At any rate she must be allowed every chance, and introduced abroad.

If he was to have any influence in their councils, he urged that the affair at home might be hushed at once; and that his father and sister should join him without delay, at Berlin.

Having mailed the letter, and determined to wait at least until he should receive a response, he dismissed the subject from his mind.

The following, however, through the next day's mail, aroused him still more thoroughly, and threw him into a tempest of rage. The letter bore neither date nor signature, and ran thus:

"If you would save the falling honor of your father's house, return to him at once. Like too many scholars and politicians of his day, engrossed with the phantasms of science, or of Utopian governments, he dreams away his existence, in fancied security here—while designing sharpers ever on the alert, are about to rob him of his most priceless jewel."

Your sister has formed the acquaintance of a low fellow of really disreputable connections, who has painted himself off on your father as the descendant of an illustrious house, and is contemplating a matrimonial alliance with him, unless your pride and good sense are prompt to interfere.

The genealogy of Earle Templeton will be furnished you, on your arrival here. If you are wise, come at once."

"And if I were the most arrant fool in Christendom, I would start within the hour," he exclaimed angrily, springing to his feet; "and God grant that I may not be too late."

His impetuosity on the route was clearly manifested to his unknown fellow-travelers. The angry frown upon his handsome features seemed to deepen with every mile. On the third evening he landed at N—, and proceeded at once to his father's residence.

Juan Alvarez, seated at his ornate and gold writing desk, looked up in amazement from his son's late letter, to find that son in person before him.

"Sebastian!" he faltered, "what—what has happened? Never was I more astonished."

"Heaven knows it is time for me to be here," answered the son, forgetting in the intensity of his emotion, the usual courtesy shown by children of rank toward their parents, "when I learn that my sister is

on the eve of being married to the grandest impostor in all England."

The father haughtily demanded an explanation of his son's undutiful conduct—and for answer, was handed the letter we have already seen.

"It is all the miserable trick of some filled quack, or the venom of some disappointed man, as the tenor of this letter would seem to imply, whose relentless enmity this young man has provoked. No, no, Sebastian, I tell you shall look in vain for Earle Templeton's like again. He is here daily, and the more I see of him the more I am convinced of this."

"Let him explain to us at once then who he is. Let him show us his pedigree," sneered Sebastian, haughtily, "and I will know whether the fellow is to be kicked off by myself or our butler."

"Sebastian, you dare not, you are beside yourself," cried the old man. Mr. Templeton is on the east end lawn with my daughter at this moment. You must promise me to be discreet; must at least treat him with courtesy, and can satisfy all your scruples, as I am sure he will be able to do."

"Then you really know nothing of the fellow whatever?" said Sebastian, with a bitter laugh.

"My own eyes and senses convince me that he is a gentleman," faltered the old man, for the first time feeling some misgivings, lest for once in his life he may have been a little too credulous. "And—and they say he is nearly related to Athol Templeton."

"They say," repeated Sebastian, scornfully. "Come then, my father, your self shall see how thoroughly I can command my temper, except when I am in the company of my equals, and shall hear what account this young prince in disguise can give of himself."

Sebastian Alvarez strode toward the low east window, and throwing it open stepped out into the court-yard. His father started up to issue a command to the young man to return, for he was alarmed at the usual hot-headed impetuosity of the latter should lead him to commit some rash act that might be fatal in its consequences; but the haughty ease of the young aristocrat's bearing, as he moved away, reassured him in a measure; and, besides, he was little anxious, without himself becoming a questioner just now (he had decided that all that should be arranged when the marriage settlement was drawn up,) to hear what final account Earle Templeton could give of himself. He decided then quietly to follow his son and see what course affairs were likely to take before interference should be necessary on either side.

At an angle in the walk before him Sebastian Alvarez beheld his sister and Templeton upon the green lawn earnestly engaged in a game of croquet. Templeton stood with his back toward them. Nina was in the act of striking the ball, and as she did so and looked up to see what line it had taken her eyes fell upon the intruder. Recognizing him in a moment, the cue dropped from her hands, and she sprang forward with a glad cry—sparkling, innocent joy beaming in every feature. In another instant her arms were about his neck.

"Dear, dear Sebastian, we shall be so happy now!"

He drew her fondly toward him, he could not do otherwise than that, for in any event he knew she was more sinned against than sinning, and pressed his lips to her brow. He released her then and stood for a moment in silence at her side.

Earle Templeton had recognized the visitor too, and was drawing near with that

characteristic dignity of manner, that became him so well. He had felt himself unworthy of his betrothed only because he could not give her a full measure of affection; but peer in all else, he had never given her brother's thought in their matrimonial arrangements.

Fresh from the society of titled nobles, Sebastian Alvarez, despite his anger, could not reflect, at this moment, that he had nowhere seen in their midst a finer specimen of manhood than this unknown aspirant for his sister's hand. With the look that he had wished to express only cold disdain, there mingled in spite of himself, a surprised admiration for the singularly striking and impressive face, and stern, pitiless eyes that never seemed to have quailed before mortal gaze.

"Why are you here so much sooner than we expected?" said Nina, hastening to break the embarrassing pause. "And do you not recognize Mr. Templeton?"

"The hero who rescued us from a briny grave?" Oh, yes," answered her brother, severely. "I think we thanked Mr. Templeton substantially by placing in his hands some considerable law business for ourselves and our friends. So, before I can take the hand he offers, I trust he will excuse me if I take the liberty of asking him a few pertinent questions in the presence of my father."

"I hope Señor Alvarez will make a nice distinction between pertinent and impertinent forms of interrogation," said Templeton, with a cold smile.

"My daughter," interrupted Juan Alvarez, with some perturbation, "we have neglected some little business matters which had best be arranged at once; and your presence can but be a restraint upon us. You will please go in, and we will follow you, I hope to the satisfaction of all parties, in a few moments."

She looked up at him with alarmed inquisitiveness, her habit of obedience, and the emulous uneasiness she could not banish, each struggling for supremacy. Another searching look from her father, however, had the desired effect, and only stopping at his side long enough to whisper, "For my sake, dear father, do not let Sebastian be rude, he would never forgive it," she turned quickly and took the walk that led to the house.

Profound silence was observed by the three, until her form had quite disappeared behind the shrubbery, and even then each seemed determined that the other should be the first to speak.

Finally Sebastian, as it became him, began:

"Mr. Templeton, a few days ago the astounding intelligence reached me abroad—intelligence that I would have deemed utterly fabulous had it not been communicated above my father's signature—that you were paying your addresses to Donna Nina Alvarez with the ultimate expectation of meeting with success. Even then I pronounced the letter a clever counterfeiter, and hastened homeward in the confident expectation of proving it such. Your presence here, however, gives, I must say, a seeming credence to the statement."

"Your incredulity—the result, I suppose, of your recent associations, was at first at fault," answered Templeton, with another haughty smile. "I presume your father has already attested to the correctness of your information."

"Then, Mr. Templeton, I am present to hear what you have to say for yourself." Earle Templeton leaned against the trunk of a centennial oak, outwardly unmoved, unless the swift darkening of his eyes from their usual steel-like brilliancy to the intense blackness of night, as had frequently been observed, when his anger, instantaneous and pitiless had been aroused, might to an acute physiognomist have argued danger and evil to those about him.

"I don't think I have anything whatever to say," he answered, calmly; but those who were weatherwise would have known it was the calm before the storm.

"And yet you dare to aspire to my sister's hand?"

"Again you are correct." "By heavens! dearly as I have loved her, I would ponder her with my own hands first," exclaimed the young man, indignantly. "Who are you, sir?"

"A man who has had some hard lessons in life to learn; but never one so difficult as to command himself now."

"Tush, man!" said young Alvarez. "Should your life be spared and happy, should afford you a few more opportunities for gentlemanly association, you will learn to control a temper which I see is bad. Yet you have boasted, they tell me, of your lineage. Give me the name of your grandfather, and I shall be encouraged to pursue the conversation."

"A wise man would have ended it long ago." "Come, come," interrupted the old man, impatiently. "This bandying of words is unworthy of you both. Sebastian, as you hope for my forgiveness, I command you to be silent; and you, Mr. Templeton, hear me. My son has been favored with anonymous communications regarding you—such as we have received here—and it has naturally aroused his suspicions. You must forgive a great deal when you remember that it is the welfare of our dear Nina that he has at heart."

Sebastian's face colored angrily. "Father!" "If you wish me to be silent, you must leave my sister's name out of this discussion."

"We cannot do so," answered Alvarez, nervously, for a nameless something in Earle Templeton's face had rendered him timid as a woman; "but for the fact that Mr. Templeton expects to wed my daughter, we would have absolutely no right to interrogate him with regard to his connections at all. As it is, however, and he raised his eyes deprecatingly to Earle's darkening brow. "I am sure, Mr. Templeton, you will forgive me if I beg you to satisfy my son, and explain to us at once the exact social position of your late parents, and what it is at which your enemies are ever darkly hinting."

"Don Alvarez," said Templeton, and his low, musical voice had never wrought with greater power upon a jury than upon his hearers at this moment, "I must positively decline to recognize your son in any manner whatever in the negotiations between us. Your daughter is under your charge, and from you alone I have sought permission to woo her. To you alone, when a suitable opportunity is offered, I will answer any questions that I think you have a right to ask."

"Sebastian," replied the father, "you hear what Mr. Templeton says, and he is right. We will leave you here while I have some conversation with Mr. Templeton in my study."

The young man thus commanded turned indignantly on his heel and walked away, while the father, motioning to Templeton, led the way in silence back to the house.

"Now, Mr. Templeton," he resumed, when he had entered his private audience-room and closed the door behind them, "will you be kind enough to explain to me what is the degree of relationship between you and old Athol Templeton, Earl Templeton."

"None whatever," said Templeton, quickly, "not nearer than with yourself."

"No relation?" gasped the Spaniard. "I thought you were of his house, and took your name from him."

"So far you are strangely enough correct," answered Templeton, sadly. "I am of Athol Templeton's household, and bear the same name, but so far as I know I have not one drop of kindred blood in my veins."

"So far as you know! In God's name who were your parents then?" cried Juan Alvarez, eagerly.

"I do not know," replied the young man with a flush upon his proud features. "I have been assured by one who knows, but the secret died with him. (I allude to the late Carroll Tremayne) that my parents were the victims of a dark conspiracy, and that my father was most foully murdered—my mother being a ward of Athol Templeton, and that she died when I was born. Beyond this I know nothing—absolutely nothing. Once in my burning anxiety to know, I flew to Templeton and forced my way into the presence of the mad old earl, but I could extort nothing but curses and reproaches, and on my return I promised my guardian, Mr. Tremayne, that never on earth would I make the like attempt again. He assured me of one thing however, that the blood in my veins was not one whit less noble than that which flows through the rheumatic limbs of this crabbled old earl, but that I might just as well seek to stay the sun in his course as to find out who I was, while Athol Templeton lived."

"It is a sad story," said Alvarez, after an embarrassing silence of a few moments, "and you will excuse me, Mr. Templeton, for saying so—a story enveloped in a great deal of romantic mystery. I—I am afraid it may not be so fair as you have been led to suppose. My remotest family connections have never allied themselves with people of doubtful nobility. I am afraid we have been a little indiscreet, Mr. Templeton. I am sure Sebastian will have more reason than ever to think so. I know this Earl of Templeton, and you must at least permit me to question him with regard to your birth, ere my daughter is allowed to see you again."

"I have neither power nor wish to refuse you permission, though I am confident you will gain no additional information," answered Templeton, mournfully. "But, sir, remember, pray, that I am the accepted lover of your daughter, and have a right at least to explain to her my position before I leave your house to-day. It may be," and for the first time his voice faltered, "it may be some time ere I see her again. I shall be satisfied to speak to her here in your presence."

"I hardly think that necessary, Mr. Templeton," replied Don Alvarez, with increasing coolness. "Nina is an obedient daughter, and she will explain all to her. I assure you that justice shall be done to you, and that you shall hear from us again. My daughter loves you, sir, and I have her happiness to consider. In the meantime you have only to be quiet."

"And to bid you good-evening," said Templeton, rising. "I shall, however, take the liberty of writing to your daughter."

"I had rather you would not," answered Alvarez. "The butler will show you out, Mr. Templeton," and the young man turned away with a heavy heart. Nina Alvarez had never seemed to him so dear as now, when there was a prospect of her being lost to him forever. Every look and word of hers, so full of the most ardent attachment, yet so eloquent of woman's holiest refinement, came back to him now to wring his heart.

A few stars were already twinkling in the firmament as he came forth, and he looked up at them with a weary earnestness of expression that had in it nothing of the grand strength he had displayed an hour before.

"Oh," he thought wildly, "never had I dreamed that woman could be so dear to me again. In love destined to prove only a false dawn to my whole existence?"

"Earle!"

The gate was before him, and against one of its pillars leaned Nina Alvarez. Her face seemed whiter than the dress she wore.

"You are going, and without one word of farewell to me!" The plaintive sadness in her voice smote him to the heart.

"My soul's own, it was your father's wish, and in his house I had no alternative but to obey. And, darling, thank Heaven for this one word of parting; only trust me, and I shall yet win my way to your side through an army of opposition."

"What is it, Earle?" Her little jeweled hand lay on his arm. "You have done nothing that renders you unworthy?"

"What says your heart, Nina?"

"That yours, my darling, has never known one throb of fear or guilt. I could trust you to the world's end and forever."

"You are right, my Nina. It is some quibble about quality of rank. And you will wait patiently until it is settled."

"Until death shall part us."

Wearily the beautiful head had drooped upon his arm. He caught her to his heart, imprinted a kiss that had in it something of holy benediction upon her brow, when, as if unable to trust himself farther, he tore himself away, and left her standing alone for the moment, stunted and powerless, gazing after his retreating form.

And as he walked on under the stars, that seemed so far off and cheerless on that desolate winter's evening, those words came back to him like the voice of Fate—"Until death shall part us."

"Can you not see?" Donald answers,

Two lovers stand by the river side,
Watching its waters rushing pride;
June's sun shines fair, June's trees are green,
And the river sings a duple's love scene.

"Flowers—they are blossoming;
Trees are red,
You—they are breathing;
Fond words are said."

The skies are gloomy, the leaves are shed,
December's clouds ride overhead;
Alone a sorrowful maiden stands,
And the river sings an ode to her hands:

"Flowers—they are faded;
Trees are dead,
You—they are broken;
Love—it is fled."
—J. F. HARMON.

1874. 1874.

OUR OPENING STORIES

FOR

THE NEW YEAR.

Davy Crockett on the Track;

OR,

The Cave of the Counterfeiters.

BY FRANK CARROLL.

AUTHOR OF "THE HERO OF GLENDALE," "JOHN FARMER'S FLOT," ETC.

This captivating story, which has for its hero that far-famed hunter and backwoodsman of Tennessee, Col. Davy Crockett, will be commenced in the Post of Jan. 3, 1874. (No. 23.) It is a first-class romance, and one which we are happy to be able to announce for the opening of the New Year. We shall also begin, a short time afterward, a fascinating novel of English life entitled

The Ghost of Norman Park.

BY MARY ATHERSTONE BIRD;

to be followed by the thrilling romance of Northern and of Tropical Life—

THE SEA OF FIRE;

OR,

ON THE BRINK OF A PRECIPICE.

BY MAURICE F. EGAN.

Also, by a new story from the pen of BURN THORNTON, whose late work, "JAMES DALE, The Conductor's Daughter," now being published in this paper, has excited much interest by its strange plot and striking incidents. His new serial will be entitled

HARD TIMES;

OR,

THE REAL VICTIMS OF THE PANIC.

A TALE OF THE WINTER OF 1873-74.

It is scarcely necessary to state to those acquainted with The Post, that the best stories of Love, Adventure, and High and Low Life, in this country and in England, etc., to be found in any weekly paper, will appear in our columns during the coming year. Our Letters, Miscellaneous Articles, etc., also will be of the highest character.

CLAUDIA'S TRIUMPH.

BY CLEMENTINE MONTAGU,

AUTHOR OF "THE COST OF CONQUEST," ETC.

CHAPTER XLII.

HIDDEN TO THE FEAST.

There was a sound of revelry by night, and bright lamps shone on fair women and brave men.

Austin Bertram looked quizzically up at his friend.

"I do think you are crazy about that affair, Vavasor," he said, gravely. "Of course, I don't know why you fancy Glosion had any hand in it, and I don't want to hunt through the world for him if you will. He was a great scoundrel, I grant, and I wish you joy of him when you find him; but don't torment me by talking of that bygone Westpark affair—the very remembrance of it makes me ill."

"It had a terrible effect on you at the time, Bertram."

"It had, and I hate to think of it. It was so dreadful to be in a house with a man, his guest, and then to have him brought home dead in that awful way. It has seemed to haunt me ever since whenever I have been at all ill or worried."

"I'll not talk of it any more," Frank replied. "Here's your glass. I hope I haven't burnt it while I've been talking to you."

"Not you. You are the best cook of that sort of thing I ever came across. You don't worry a fellow over it like a woman does."

He drank his glass, and Frank said no more of Jasper Glosion and the tragedy at Westpark; but he thought continually about it, and the name of the man Glosion haunted him continually. His mind was on the rack from other causes as well, and he grew pale and thin from sheer anxiety and loss of rest.

He had seen Alma since her return to London once. She was driving in the park with her husband, exquisitely dressed, and in a carriage which was the envy of all the fashionable throng in the "Ladies Mile;" but her face was pale and wan, and he read in her thin cheeks and quivering lips, and her eyes all heavy with unshed tears, the weight of hopeless misery she had to bear at home.

He was burning with a mad longing to see her, to rescue her in some way from her wretched imprisonment—for he knew her existence was nothing more—to comfort her somehow, and he daily formed a thousand impracticable schemes to help and cheer her.

Austin Bertram, as he grew better, saw what was passing in his mind, and managed to fan the flame in a hundred ways. "Have courage and patience," he said, one day, when his friend had been speaking to him of Alma.

"Patience! when I see her dying by inches! For she is dying. No one could look upon her face and not see it."

"Yes, patience. If you do anything rash or indiscreet, you will not only see her, but make my lord harsher to her than ever."

"It's very well for you to preach, Frank replied, ungraciously; "you don't love her as I do."

"No, thank goodness; therefore, I can look at the matter with unprejudiced eyes. I say again, have patience. You shall see her before long."

"But how?"

"Leave it to me."

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, you may. I'll find a way, see if I do not, as soon as I am able to get out."

"But if you fail?"

"I don't offer to fail in anything I make up my mind to do, my dear boy. Lord Nortonshall won't draw the rein so tight after a bit, and all these disagreeable matters will find their own level. Rely on me, and you shall see my lady, never fear."

Claudia was somewhat disappointed at Frank's promise. She had hoped, in spite of herself, for some assistance from him, and she saw plainly by its tone that she might expect none. She showed it to Frank, who shook his head.

"He cannot help me, you see," she said, sadly.

"I don't think that is it. I think he was willing to assist me if he could. He was very civil and respectful when I spoke to him about it."

"He would not dare be otherwise; but I think 'will not' is the true meaning of this letter. He is too polite to do more than inform you that he has seen what you were so anxious to repossess."

"And I will repossess them, whatever I do, whatever people say, whatever the cost may be to myself!"

"Have you counted the cost well, dear Claudia?" the young man asked, in a tone that made her heart thrill by its tenderness.

"It will cost you much sorrow, maybe, now and afterward."

"It will not matter," she replied, quietly. "I must have them, or I shall feel I have murdered my soul. Oh, Frank, every night I lie down in dread, every morning I wake in terror, lest something should happen to this poor lady. She is in London, they say. Have you seen her?"

"Yes," he replied, in a choking voice. "I have seen her."

"Where?"

"In the park."

"With her husband?"

"With her jailor, rather. Yes, she was with him, looking like a corpse. Claudia, when I think of her, I feel as though my heart would burst—and I am powerless to help her—utterly and entirely powerless."

"But I am not, Frank, and I will do it. My heart is breaking too," she added, under her breath, "but no one minds that—no, not one."

Christmas came, with its warmth of good cheer, and its light, and life, and merriment in the houses of the rich, and its bitter, biting poverty and cold in the homes of those who could hear no more of the cries of want around them; and Lord Nortonshall issued invitations for a dinner, and evening party to follow.

They were in his wife's name, and the guests assembled, but there was no hostess to receive them. His lordship made every apology.

"Lady Nortonshall had been taken very ill only that day; but she sent her love, and hoped her non-appearance might be no bar to their enjoyment," &c., &c.

All this was delivered with due emphasis, and a proper shade of regret; but there were some remarks that were not blotted by the intelligence, and among them were Austin Bertram and Lord Wedderburn.

"Very pretty, and very well done," the former said to himself, as he listened to their host's sorrow for his wife's non-appearance; "but I don't believe in it for all that. It is the beginning of the end, I fancy, and the world will see no more of my lady till she leaves the house in her coffin. It's a very pretty game to watch, and extremely interesting to lookers-on."

His surmise was in part correct. Alma was not worse than she had been ever since she came to town. She was simply a prisoner by her husband's capricious orders.

Early in the day he had visited her in her room, and sternly forbidden her to leave her own apartments during the evening.

"Why, Graham, this is the night of the party," she said, in surprise.

"I do not intend that you shall attend it, Lady Nortonshall," he replied, coldly.

"Why not?"

"That is my business, madam," he said, with an evil look. "Perhaps I am anxious about your delicate health; perhaps—"

"Well?"

"Perhaps I do not care to meet my friends with my faithless wife for their hostess; perhaps—"

"Stop!" she said, in a tone that made him pause, it was so full of suppressed rage; "you have said quite enough, Graham Nortonshall. You lie, and you know it."

"I do not lie."

"You do."

"Tragedy airs will not serve you, Lady Nortonshall. I would rather believe in the evidences of my own eyes, which saw you in another man's arms, his cheek against your face, his arms about your waist, in the fine speeches and theatrical airs in the world. Remember, madam, you are too ill to be seen. Langham, you will remember it too."

"Certainly, my lord," Langham replied, with a smile; "my lady will admit no one."

"Will the actress be here?"

Lady Nortonshall asked the question in a sudden and sharp tone, which made both her husband and his myrmidon start.

"I am not sure who will be here till I see them," she answered, shortly.

"Will the actress be here?"

He repeated the question in the same hard, bitter tone, and he answered her directly this time with a sneering smile on his cruel face.

"Claudia! I hope so—I believe so. I did not fail to send her a card. The party would be sadly incomplete without her lovely face to add to the brightness of the scene."

"Coward!" she hissed, between her set teeth, while her face seemed absolutely transformed with rage and despair. "You can be dastardly as well as cruel. You shall not have your way in this instance!"

"Indeed?"

"Who is to prevent me?"

"I will."

"How? In the way that any outraged wife would do. If that abandoned woman sets foot in this house to-night, I will assert my position as its mistress, and have her turned from the door. Your wife will play the hostess in her own house, and keep it clear of such creatures, even though her husband deems them worthy of the honor of his friendship."

"Have you quite finished?" he asked, with a look of fiendish triumph in his eyes.

"Quite."

"You have no more opinions to offer, nor fine speeches to make?"

"No."

"Then listen to me: you will do nothing so absurd. The house is mine, to receive whom I please in, and I am not going to have my evening spoiled, and the pleasure of my guests interrupted by the presence of a woman. You will not come down—you will go to bed."

"You will," he replied, in a cold, hard tone, that made her shrink and shiver with its cruelty. "Langham, see that she does so."

"Yes, my lord."

"And then, my virtuously indignant lady, I shall take the liberty of turning the key before I go to my guests. I should not like any *extraneous* to mar our pleasant evening."

His wife made no answer this time. She only waved her hand with an impatient gesture, as though she would fain be alone.

It was no use to argue with a man of his cowardly, cruel nature, and she sank into the nearest chair in utter helplessness, while Langham stood looking at her with malicious satisfaction in her face.

She was a creature after Lord Nortonshall's own heart, this smart lady's maid—obsequious and unscrupulous, and ready to do anything for money. He made her the instrument of his cruelty to his unhappy wife, and it was through her agency that all sorts of indignities were heaped upon the unhappy lady. Alma bore them in silence, knowing well that her attendant was a spy, and that every word she uttered would find its way to her husband's ears.

Lord Nortonshall took no further notice of his wife, but left the room, holding a whispered conference with Langham outside the door, an insult of which Alma took no notice.

The day wore on, and as the evening deepened into night the guests arrived—a merry party, politely regretful for the absence of the mistress of the house, but bearing it remarkably well for all that, and eating and drinking, and making merry, in silence, knowing well that her attendant was a spy, and that every word she uttered would find its way to her husband's ears.

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Austin Bertram proposed to waive a terrible web of circumstantial evidence round Lady Nortonshall, and bring about, with ill-advised haste, the denouement of the drama of real life in which he was playing so base and deceitful a part.

He returned to the drawing-room (just in time to hear Claudia's name announced), and he watched the manner of her reception with considerable interest.

Lord Nortonshall greeted her with marked *emprovement*, and proceeded to present her to such of his guests as had not previously been introduced to her. She was looking so beautiful. She was attired in a magnificent white lace dress, looped up here and there with deep crimson flowers; a wreath of the same rested on her glossy dark hair, and two magnificent bracelets—his lordship's gifts—glittered on her arms.

He was enraptured as he gazed on her, thinking he had never seen so lovely a picture, and a murmur of admiration ran through the room—from the gentlemen, at least.

The ladies, if they admired, condensed also, and most of them pressed their lips in silence, knowing well that her attendant was a spy, and that every word she uttered would find its way to her husband's ears.

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